

MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

CA Fish and Game Commission

Committee Chairs: Commissioner Rogers and Commissioner Sutton

Meeting Summary

September 27, 2011

Center for the Future of the Oceans

Heritage Harbor

99 Pacific Street, Suite 100A. Monterey, CA 93940

Summary of MRC Recommendations:

- Kelp leases
 - Request the Department to develop short and long-term priorities and develop a regulatory package to address short-term priorities.
- Abalone educational video and report cards
 - Request staff work with the Department to develop an educational video that demonstrates responsible abalone harvest techniques.
 - Request staff to develop a regulatory package that addresses return rates of abalone report cards, fees for sturgeon report cards and a tracking system for report card species caught by individuals who are not required to possess a fishing license (i.e., pier fishing and free fishing days).
- California halibut stock assessment
 - Request the Department closely track the California halibut fishery and notify the Commission of any potential changes that might indicate that a regulatory change would be needed to promote a sustainable fishery.

1. Informational updates

a. California Department of Fish and Game

Marine Region Manager Marija Vojkovich reported on several current projects within the Marine Region that relate to the MRC. The Marine Region is finalizing background analyses for the salt water bass complex and is planning to give a full presentation to the MRC at its next meeting to describe the results of the analysis and possible regulatory options. The Department has also started to reach out to private anglers and the CPFV fleet to initiate discussions and provide background information.

Department biologists have been doing their best to overcome poor weather and diving conditions to continue to collect data on the abalone populations on the north coast affected by the recent die off. The data collected by Department biologists will be used, alongside with data from other organizations such as PISCO and Reef Check, to help inform the status of recovery and inform management decisions for next year.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is developing the preliminary groundfish rules for next season. There do not appear to be any major changes and it is likely that most fisheries will

stay close to the status quo. The Department will be setting up a website to take public comments relative to the management options.

b. California Ocean Protection Council

The Commission's Marine Advisor, Craig Shuman, conveyed an update of OPC activities and walked through the draft OPC Strategic Plan.

- The work plan for the spiny lobster FMP has been drafted and is anticipated to be approved soon
- The Aquaculture PEIR is moving forward. It is anticipated that all comments from the Department and Aquaculture Development Committee will be to the consultant by mid November, at which point the consultant is expected to provide a timeline for completion
- San Francisco's Fishermen's Wharf Seafood Market at Pier 45 is anticipated to be up and running by next crab season
- The final protocol for the California Sustainable Seafood Initiative is expected to be considered by the OPC in December for possible adoption and authorization of initial funds.
- Collaborative Fisheries Research – West is finalizing its request for proposals. The RFP is anticipated to be circulated in November with projects up and running by June 2012.
- The OPC Strategic Plan was released for public review on August 1. There were three public workshops and greater than 100 public comments were received by the deadline of September 12, 2011. The MRC walked through the Sustainable Fisheries and Marine Ecosystem Focal area which led to discussions on the need to focus on a few key themes and the value of a strong collaborative relationship between the OPC, Commission and Department.

2. Discussion: Lease of kelp beds for exclusive harvest

Marine Region Biologist Brian Owens provided an extensive overview of kelp harvesting, kelp leases, and MPAs. The presentation provided background information, including the Commission's policy on kelp harvest, and solicited MRC input on how to address the overlap of existing administrative kelp leases and MPAs as well as other general management issues. The initial part of the discussion focused on issues of a current kelp bed lease application before the Commission and then expanded to address the broader issues raised in the presentation.

Following discussion, the MRC determined that it would recommend the following to the Commission:

- Request the Department identify short and long-term priorities and develop a regulatory package for short-term priorities that addresses anticipated immediate kelp bed/MPA conflicts, kelp bed boundaries and general kelp management needs.

3. Presentation: Drift gill net fishery

Heidi Taylor from the National Marine Fisheries Service Sustainable Fisheries Division presented a summary of a workshop that was held in May in San Diego to address sustainability issues in the United States west coast swordfish fishery. The workshop concluded that swordfish stocks are healthy and that there may be opportunities to expand the U.S West Coast Swordfish fishery in an environmental and economically sustainable manner.

Although the Commission does not have authority over the gill net swordfish fishery in state waters, discussion focused on how the Commission may desire to take an active role and establish policy in a non-regulatory role. The MRC will continue to track this issue at the Pacific Fishery Management Council and work with the Department and stakeholders to evaluate the components that might be beneficial in a California swordfish fishery.

4. Update: California spiny lobster Fishery Management Plan and stock assessment

Marine Region Manager Marija Vojkovich provided an update of the spiny lobster FMP and stock assessment. Technical review of the stock assessment was completed in August and the final review has been received. The stock assessment and review indicate that there are no major concerns with the stock at this time. Following approval of the work plan by OPC, the Department will focus on moving forward with the development of the FMP.

After discussion, the MRC requested that the lobster FMP be included as a standing agenda item for future MRC meetings.

5. Discussion: Recreational red abalone fishery report card returns and educational programs

The Commission's Marine Advisor, Craig Shuman and Executive Director, Sonke Mastrup, led a discussion on an abalone educational video and issues related to report card returns. The existing abalone video describing proper tagging techniques has been viewed close to 19,000 times on the Department's website and You Tube page. This corresponds to an estimated 50% viewership of individuals who have purchased an abalone report card. It was agreed that there is a need for an additional video that focuses on responsible harvesting practices but that a mandatory video was beyond the capabilities of ALDS at this time.

The report card discussion focused on three primary objectives:

- Increase return rate of report cards
- Minimize abuse of replacement report cards
- A tracking system for report card species caught by individuals who do not need to possess a fishing license (piers, free fishing days, and youths under 16 years of age).

Following discussion, the MRC determined to make a recommendation to the Commission to direct staff to prepare a regulatory package that included the following items:

- Implement a penalty for failure to return abalone report cards that includes an increased fee and/or loss of ability to purchase the report card in a subsequent year
- Develop a fee structure for the sturgeon report card
- Prohibit take of report card species by individuals over 16 years of age who do not possess a fishing license

6. Presentation: California halibut stock assessment and data poor assessment results

Travis Tanaka, Associate Marine Biologist with the Department's State Finfish Management Project presented the results of the California halibut stock assessment covering the period of 1971 – 2010. The stock assessment split the population into two components, the central stock

north of Pt. Conception and the southern stock south of Pt. Conception. Despite the uncertainty in the assessment, the central stock appeared to be healthy and that stock abundance was related to environmentally driven recruitment as opposed to fishing. The southern stock was estimated to be depleted to 14% or less of unexploited spawning biomass, which is similar to the level of stock depletion at the start of the assessment in 1971, estimated at 16% of unexploited biomass. The peer review panel concluded that the stock assessment was acceptable for management and made several recommendations to improve the assessment in a few years. The Department also conducted several data-poor assessments that supported the stock assessment conclusions.

Based on the results of the stock assessment, the Department recommended a precautionary approach that uses the pending network of MPAs in southern California as an insurance policy against further decline and closely tracks the fishery to identify potential areas of concern. The MRC agreed with the Department's proposed approach but also expressed their desire to possibly explore additional management measures if the MPAs in the south coast were not implemented in a timely manner.

7. Discussion: Future MRC meeting dates and possible agenda items

The MRC set its next meeting date for January 18th in Santa Barbara and will set the schedule for the rest of the year following determination of the meeting dates of the full Commission.

8. Adjourn